I have mentioned that tribal wars were largely due to a lack of unity amongst the sheikhs, but there was one interesting and significant period in the history of Oman when the rulers of south-east Arabia were unified as a political force. This occurred towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the twentieth, when the Wahabi sect (so potent an influence in present-day Arab politics), wielded great power in Arabia and were constantly at war with Great Britain, causing us considerable irritation in the early days of our trade along the Persian Gulf.

The Wahabis were a fanatical religious sect of Mohammedans, a branch of the Sunnis. They claim descent from Ali-bin-Abi Talib, the cousin and adopted son of the Prophet Mohammed, whose daughter Fatimah he had married. The failure of Ali to succeed his father-in-law was the cause of serious dissensions in the Mohammedan world, leading to interminable wars and schisms which split the Arabs into innumerable sects, of which the Wahabis are one. These schisms have continued to the present day, and are the main reason why, in spite of the Arab League, and the efforts of King Farouk of Egypt and King Ibn Saud to unite Islam, the Arab world will never coalesce as it did in the days of Mohammed.

The Wahabis, who will be remembered in recent times for the disaffection they fomented in Egypt, have always been schemers and political rebels. They are fanatical in the extreme, and are the most puritanical of all Arab sects, having little of the tolerance of the modern Arab. Their chief asset at one time was their religious and bloodthirsty intolerance, and being well-organized and trained fighters, they conquered a large part of southern and south-eastern Arabia. They held the Oman tribes in subjection and practically forced them into piracy and banditry, the purpose of this being to harass the British and cause as much political confusion as possible in the Persian Gulf. Paradoxically, it was this invasion of Wahabi influence which forced the Oman sheikhs, for the first time in history, to become united. Tribal wars ceased, because they were against the interests of the Wahabi leaders, and the sheikhs degenerated into little more than petty sub-chiefs and pirates.

At the beginning of the century, the power of the Wahabis in Arabia was finally broken. Piracy had been stamped out by the British naval authorities for many years, and by the Treaty of 1892 the Trucial Sheikhs ratified the earlier Treaty of 1853, which provided for the entire cessation of liabilities at sea amongst the signatories, and imposed on the British Government the duty of enforcing

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a note, but I have discussed the affairs of Oman with various Government officials, and there was nothing to indicate from their attitude that the Arabs have any justification for hoping that Great Britain will aid their social and economic regeneration. She will continue to adopt a benevolent attitude, will supply them with erudite pamphlets on democracy prepared by the British Council, and will ensure that they are protected from famine; apart from this, and much charitable advice from her suave Political Officers, she will allow the Trucial Coast Arabs to retain their primitive, feudal existence as long as it suits her to control the Gulf.

Lest it be thought that I am moved by political interests to attack the British regime in Arabia, I wish to emphasize that I have no interest in politics apart from the prescriptive rights of a member of the electorate. As a friend and admirer of the Arab race, however, I feel strongly that we have taken undue advantage of these people and have unethically avoided our responsibilities towards them. My protest is written in the hope that it may evoke a sense of shame, and encourage at least some members of the Government or public to insist that an official investigation should be made into conditions in this territory.

There is much discontent in the Arab world, and everywhere forces are at work, undermining British authority and attempting to foment rebellion against British rule. It would be pitiable if, after a hundred years of order and friendly relations with the Arabs of the Trucial Oman Coast, our lamentable policy of *laissez faire* and indifference should ultimately estrange this race and give rise to forces of reaction which might undo the admirable work of our pioneers and administrators.